DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 120 601 CG 010 429

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TITLE Different Blames for Different Names: Divergent Self-Other Attributions for Success and Failure.
PUB DATE May 75
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (46th, Chicago, Illinois, May 2-4, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Achievement Rating; Behavior Patterns; College Students; Failure Factors; *Locus of Control; *Motivation; Performance Factors; *Psychological Characteristics; Psychological Studies; Research Projects; *Social Attitudes; Success Factors
IDENTIFIERS *Attribution Theory

ABSTRACT

The effects of actor identity on achievement attributions for success and failure were investigated. Subjects filled out a locus of control scale either for themselves, a neutral other, a liked other, or a disliked other. Within each actor identity variation, the scale items were either (1) unchanged from the original version or specified as (2) important or (3) unimportant. On positive (success) scale items, more personal causation was assigned for neutral and liked others than for the self and less for the self than for disliked others. On negative (failure) scale items, less personal causation was assigned for liked others than for the self and neutral others and less for these two groups than for disliked others. Further inspection of individual causes (ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck) indicated that successful neutral others were credited similar to liked others and unsuccessful neutral others were blamed similar to disliked others. Item importance had little effect on causal attributions and did not produce evidence consistent with self-serving attributional notions. The implications of the results for both attributional analyses of achievement motivation and self-other perspective were discussed. (Author)

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Different Blames for Different Names:
Divergent Self-Other Attributions for Success and Failure

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Recently we became interested in examining the assumption of Weiner's attributional analysis of achievement motivation that "equivalent information is employed and identical inferences reached when making judgments about (the causes of achievement behavior of) oneself or others" (Weiner, Frieze, Kukla, Reed, Rest, & Rosenbaum, 1971, p. 5). Particularly disturbing was the fact that several studies cited as evidence for the self-perception hypotheses of the analysis inappropriately required subjects to evaluate the success and failure of others (e.g., Rest, Nierenberg, Weiner, & Heckhausen, 1973, Exp. I-III; Weiner & Kukla, 1970, Exp. I & II). Consequently, to directly assess self-other effects on achievement attributions, we amended one of the original Weiner and Kukla (1970) studies to include other-perception as well as self-perception conditons. In this study (Medway, 1974), college males completed Mehrabian's (1968) measure of achievement motivation. As in Weiner and Kukla, Exp. IV, half the subjects also completed a version of the Intellectual Achievement Responsibility (IAR) scale (Crandall, Katkovsky, & Crandall, 1965) assessing attributions for their own achievement outcomes. The other half of the subjects completed an identical scale changed only to refer to a general other male student's achievement outcomes.

The results from this study failed to replicate Weiner and Kukla (1970). High achievers did not attribute more personal causation to their own success than did low achievers and correlations between achievement motivation and

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Abstract

The effects of actor identity on achievement attributions for success and failure were investigated. Subjects filled out a locus of control scale either for themselves, a neutral other, a liked other, or a disliked other. Within each actor identity variation, the scale items were either (1) unchanged from the original version or specified as (2) important or (3) unimportant. On positive (success) scale items, more personal causation was assigned for neutral and liked others than for the self and less for the self than for disliked others. On negative (failure) scale items, less personal causation was assigned for liked others than for the self and neutral others and less for these two groups than for disliked others. Further inspection of individual causes (ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck) indicated that successful neutral others were credited similar to liked others and unsuccessful neutral others were blamed similar to disliked others. Item importance had little effect on causal attributions and did not produce evidence consistent with self-serving attributional notions. The implications of the results for both attributional analyses of achievement motivation and self-other perspective were discussed.

personal attribution on the self-perception scale were negligible. Interestingly, achievement motivation did correlate with personal attributions for another's success. What seemed most unusual at the time however, in light of theories of self-motivated attribution, was that subjects attributed their own failures more to personal causes than another's failures and showed a tendency to attribute their own successes less to personal causes than another's successes. The findings for failure attribution also ran counter to Jones and Nisbett's (1971) proposition that self-perceivers should favor environmental and other-perceivers personal causes in accounting for behavior. In short, our results seemed to suggest that informational cues regarding behavioral outcomes and possibly the person performing the behavior were outweighing motivational considerations.

Some support for this notion and confidence in our results was obtained from evidence reported by Mischel, Mailer, and Zeiss (1974) who employed a similiar paradigm. In that experiment, subjects filled out three locus of control scales--one about themselves, one about a liked other, and one about a disliked other. More personal attribution for success was assigned to liked others than to oneself and more to oneself than disliked others.

The present study was conducted in an attempt to extend and improve upon both the Medway (1974) and Mischel, Mailer, and Zeiss (1974) investigations by (1) assessing attributions to the self, neutral, liked, and disliked others using an independent groups design and (2) examining separately attributions to ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck factors as well as more global personal attributions. It was anticipated that subjects would assign more personal causation to a neutral other's than to one's

own success and conversely for failure. This pattern was expected to be enhanced for liked others and attenuated or reversed for disliked others. Relative to self-attribution, the success of liked others and the failure of disliked others should result in strong personal attributions and the failure of liked others and the success of disliked others in weak personal attributions (cf. Heider, 1958; Regan, Straus, & Fazio, 1974).

Finally, it was felt that the situations described on the IAR scale used in the Medway (1974) study may haved lacked the import to trigger motivational biases. Consequently, variations in the importance of the outcome to the target stimulus person were also investigated.

Method

Subjects and Procedure

Forty-five male and 67 female undergraduates were administered one of 12 possible variations of the Weiner and Potepan (1970) adult IAR scale. Scale items were worded so as to describe the achievement-related successes (14 items) and failures (14 items) of either oneself, a nonspecified neutral other, a specific liked other (i.e., best friend), or a specific disliked other. Within each of the four stimulus person variations, the scale items themselves were either unchanged from the original wording (e.g., doing well on a multiple-choice exam) or described as very important (e.g., doing well on a multiple-choice exam that determines the course grade) or unimportant (e.g., doing well on a multiple-choice exam that won't affect the course grade).

Of the 56 paired causes listed on the scale as response choices, 18 were ability (9 positive, 9 negative), 14 were effort (8 positive, 6 negative),

13 were task difficulty (6 positive, 7 negative) and 11 were luck (7 positive, 4 negative) referents. The total number of causal factor attributions for the separate positive and negative items were the dependent measures. In addition, personal attribution scores for positive (P+) and negative (P-) items were derived by summing and weighting equally ability and effort attributions excluding items in which these factors were paired together. Both the P+ and P- scores could range from 0 to 14.

Results

Preliminary analyses indicated no sex effects and male and female responses were combined. Stimulus Person X Importance multivariate analyses of variance were conducted on the personal and individual factor attributions for success and failure items. Differences between specific means were assessed by Duncan multiple range tests. Since the analyses of variance yielded few interesting main effects or interactions involving Importance, these results will not be discussed.

Success Attributions

Main effects involving Stimulus Person ($p < .001$, $df = 3/111$) were found on P+ ($F = 21.23$), ability ($F = 16.70$), effort ($F = 8.10$), task difficulty ($F = 15.81$), and luck ($F = 13.10$). These means summed over item importance are shown in Table 1.. It is evident from Table 1 that

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Insert Table 1 about here

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as expected, more personal attribution was assigned to neutral and liked others than to oneself and more to oneself than to disliked others. Liked others were not credited more for success than neutral others. Inspection

of the individual causal factors reveals a similiar pattern.

Failure Attributions

Main effects involving Stimulus Person were also obtained for P- ($F = 7.10$, $p < .001$) ability ($F = 6.08$, $p < .001$), effort ($F = 4.35$, $p < .01$), and task difficulty ($F = 7.11$, $p < .001$) but not luck ($F = 1.58$; all $df = 3/111$) attributions. Table 2 presents these means summed over item importance.

Insert Table 2 about here

Less personal causation was assigned to liked others than to oneself and neutral others, and less to these persons than to disliked others. However, neutral others were not blamed less for failure than oneself.

Examination of the causal factor attributions indicates that more low ability was ascribed to both disliked and neutral others than to oneself and liked others; more low effort was ascribed to both disliked others and oneself than to both neutral and liked others; and less difficult tasks were attributed to both disliked and neutral others than to liked others, and less to disliked others than to oneself.

Correlations Among the Causal Factors

The four causal factors were intercorrelated separately for success and failure items and these correlations are presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Regarding the correlations between ability and effort and between task difficulty and luck, the most interesting finding is that the two personal causes were inversely related only for the success of the neutral other.

That is, either high ability or high effort was judged sufficient for neutral others to succeed.

Table 3 also lists the correlations between the success and failure items for each factor (e.g., positive-ability vs. negative-ability, etc.). Strong negative relationships are evident between the two ability attributions and between the two task difficulty attributions (the most stable factors) within self-perception conditions, and between the two effort attributions and between the two task difficulty attributions within liked other-perception and disliked other-perception conditions. That is, subjects who saw their own success as due to high ability (or task ease) did not see their own failure as due to low ability (or task difficulty). Similiarly, subjects who saw the success of liked and disliked others as due to high effort (or task ease) did not perceive the failure of these persons as due to low effort (or task difficulty). In short, subjects were consistent in their attributions for each of the specific stimulus persons.

In contrast, the success-failure correlations for neutral others are all positive. To the extent that subjects assigned the success of neutral others to high effort, task ease, and good luck, they assigned the failure of the unspecified stimulus person to low effort, task difficulty, and bad luck.

Discussion

The major finding of this study was that subjects tended to credit others more than themselves for success and (as evidenced on the causal factors) blame others less than themselves for failure. In general, these

tendencies were accentuated for liked others and reversed for disliked others.

Clearly such perceptions do not serve to enhance or defend self-esteem. Though it is questionable whether responding to questionnaire items can arouse attributional biases, the empirical evidence for their existence is scanty and subject to information-processing interpretations (Miller & Ross, 1975).

Further, the present findings only partially support Jones and Nisbett's (1971) contention that self-perceivers favor environmental and other-perceivers personal causes in behavior judgments. When neutral others succeeded, they were seen to be more able (but not more motivated) than oneself. When neutral others failed, they were seen to be less able (but not less motivated) than oneself. Indeed, studies cited in support of the proposition have typically asked subjects to provide a reason for why an interpersonal behavior occurred (e.g., choice of girlfriend and college major--Nisbett, Caputo, Legant, & Maracek, 1973, Exp. II; first meetings of strangers--Storms, 1973) rather than require subjects to assign credit and blame for achievement outcomes.

Finally, it is especially interesting that outcome information was weighted most heavily in determining causal attributions for neutral others. As evidenced on the causal factor attributions, successful neutral others were perceived similar to successful liked others whereas unsuccessful neutral others were perceived similar to unsuccessful disliked others. Furthermore, the correlational results showed that subjects were most inconsistent in their causal inferences for these stimulus persons. In sum, the present findings highlight the need to examine more carefully self-other influences on achievement attributions and to consider subjects' familiarity with

others and knowledge of their fortunes on the causal inference process.

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Table 1

Attribution Means for Positive Items (Success) for each Identity Condition

Attribution	Stimulus Person: Self	Neutral	Liked	Disliked
	(n = 33)	(n = 26)	(n = 28)	(n = 25)
Personal Causation	7.18[a]	9.85[b]	9.74[b]	5.22[a]
Ability	4.15[a]	6.57[b]	5.99[b]	3.82[c]
Effort	4.48[a]	4.64[a]	5.08[a]	3.05[c]
Task Difficulty	2.48[a]	1.21[b]	1.56[b]	3.35[c]
Luck	3.88[a]	2.68[b]	2.36[b]	4.63[a]

Note. High scores indicate greater perceived ability, effort, task ease, and good luck. Personal causation scores were derived by summing ability and effort excluding two positive items in which they were paired together and by weighting both equally. Means with common superscripts do not differ from each other ($p < .05$ by the Duncan multiple range test).

Table 2

Attribution Means for Negative Items (Failure) for each Identity Condition

	Stimulus Person			
Attribution	Self	Neutral	Liked	Disliked
Personal Causation	7.87^{a}	7.72^{a}	6.03^{b}	9.28^{c}
Ability	4.03^{a}	4.98^{b}	3.56^{a}	4.99^{b}
Effort	3.94^{a}	3.06^{b}	3.19^{b}	4.20^{a}
Task Difficulty	3.42^{ab}	3.13^{bc}	4.20^{a}	2.49^{c}
Luck	1.46^{a}	1.68^{a}	2.01^{a}	1.43^{a}

Note. High scores indicate lack of ability and effort, and high task difficulty and bad luck. Personal causation scores were derived as for positive items (excluding two negative items where ability and effort were paired). Means with common superscripts do not differ ($p < .05$ by Duncan's test).

Table 3

Intercorrelation Coefficients for Ability (A), Effort (E), Task Difficulty (TD), and Luck (L)

		Self	Neutral	Liked	Disliked
Within Positive Items:	A-E	.07	-.46*	.04	-.06
	A-TD	-.47**	-.48*	-.66***	-.74***
	A-L	-.68***	-.45*	-.56**	-.56**
	E-TD	-.52**	-.27	-.60***	-.39
	E-L	-.61***	-.45*	-.77***	-.51**
	TD-L	.27	.33	.63***	.36
Within Negative Items:	A-E	-.17	.08	-.11	-.08
	A-TD	-.55***	-.56**	-.74***	-.58**
	A-L	-.37*	-.58**	-.12	-.60**
	E-TD	-.36*	-.64***	-.45*	-.51*
	E-L	-.53**	-.53**	-.62***	-.29
	TD-L	.02	.34	.14	.14
Between Positive and Negative Items:	A	-.48**	.36	-.14	-.05
	E	-.10	.48*	-.42	-.61**
	TD	-.46**	.41*	-.53**	-.48*
	L	.03	.40*	-.32	.27

*$p < .05$, one-tailed.

**$p < .01$, one-tailed.

***$p < .001$, one-tailed.